United Nations E/2009/NGO/30

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 June 2009

Original: English

Substantive session of 2009
Geneva, 6-31 July 2009
Item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health

Statement submitted by Catholic for a Free Choice, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2009/100.

09-36008 (E) 230609

Please recycle

Statement*

Catholics for Choice (CFC) shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives.

CFC supports policy making and governing structures that make a clear separation between church and state. We also recognize that religion can make a positive contribution to policy making, particularly in relation to social justice and human dignity. We strongly support the right of religious institutions to participate in public life. However, CFC maintains that religious organizations should be incorporated in an appropriate manner that clearly recognizes the distinction between the secular and religious realms.

As people throughout the world suffer from vicious health inequities, issues pertaining to access and capacity building as well as the future challenges of disease and the economic crisis must be addressed.

Of the many issues which need to be examined in assessing the current state of global public health and progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), few are more contentious than access to sexual and reproductive health services. As a result of the religious and cultural stigmas that often accompany these critical services, the question of sexual and reproductive health is often tabled, soft-pedaled or marginalized. This does a grave disservice to men, women and children whose health and well-being require a more holistic view that necessarily includes sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We know that women around the world suffer and die as a result of unsafe abortion. The transmission rate of HIV is unabated, despite immense expenditure on the problem, perhaps as a result of opposition to condom use from some quarters. Women and families are persistently denied the opportunity to plan when and if to expand their families. In situations of conflict and extreme poverty, these problems are amplified many times over. We believe that access to sexual and reproductive health services must not be stigmatized or rendered less of a priority; rather, these services must be provided to all those who seek them out.

This Annual Ministerial Review comes at a critical time. CFC offers the following recommendations for moving forward to achieve our common goals:

- Creating development policies that reflect people's needs and support the advancement of the MDGs and the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action;

- Developing criteria for development aid that ensures delivery of sexual and reproductive health-care services as part of a comprehensive health-care program;

* Issued without formal editing.

- Supporting organizations that provide access to family planning methods, such as the United Nations Population Fund;

- Recognizing the impact of unsafe abortion; and

- Including condom use in a comprehensive approach to prevent the transmission of HIV.

As the United Nations works to secure sexual and reproductive health and rights as a key component of the global health agenda, Catholics for Choice commits to supporting these efforts through discourse, education, research and advocacy.